

# THE NEED FOR THE DEMOCRATIC 100,000-TEACHERS, CLASS SIZE REDUCTION INITIATIVE

*A Class size has one of the most profound effects  
on the learning environment.*

c Dr. Barbara Nye, Tennessee State University

In these final budget negotiations, Democrats are fighting for full funding for the Administration=s Class Size Reduction Initiative.

This Democratic initiative is designed to help local school districts hire 100,000 new well-prepared teachers over seven years to reduce the average class size nationwide in the early grades to 18 students per classroom.

Democrats are fighting for this initiative to reduce class size in the early grades because this initiative would:

- 1) raise the level of student achievement;**
- 2) improve classroom discipline; and**
- 3) better ensure that children are receiving the personal attention they need.**

Under this initiative, once a state has reached an average class size of 18 in grades one through three, it can use these funds to further reduce class size in the early grades, or it can extend its efforts to other grades.

Furthermore, this Democratic initiative helps provide qualified teachers in grades one through three by requiring states to implement basic skills testing for new teachers, providing funding for teacher training and testing, and encouraging states to adopt rigorous professional tests and upgrade teacher certification requirements.

## ***GOP Congress Is Now Trying To Renege On Last Year=s Bipartisan Commitment To This Initiative***

Last year, Congress made a bipartisan commitment to implement the class size reduction initiative. As a part of that commitment, Congress provided \$1.2 billion on July 1, 1999 for the first downpayment for this initiative. As a result, communities throughout America have already hired approximately 29,000 highly-qualified teachers for the current school year. These teachers are being placed primarily in grades one through three and class sizes are being reduced significantly as well. This initiative is working.

However, now, the GOP Congress is trying to renege on the bipartisan commitment that was made by Congress last year. The GOP Labor-HHS-Education spending bill that was vetoed by President Clinton on November 3 guts the class size reduction initiative --

providing no guaranteed funding stream for class size reduction and no guarantee that the 29,000 teachers hired last summer can continue teaching smaller classes around the country. It also provides no funding for the additional 8,000 teachers that the Administration=s request would support this year.

Instead, the GOP bill funds a poorly-defined, very broad education block grant B a block grant that can be used for class size reduction or for any educational program which the school district defines as Aimproving student performance.@ Indeed, the education block grant is so broadly defined that an analysis by the General Counsel of the Education Department found that school districts would be free to even use the block grant funds to provide vouchers for students attending private schools.

As President Clinton pointed out, in a Rose Garden statement he made on November 3, when vetoing this GOP bill:

***AThis bill fails to invest the right way in education. It reneges on last year=s bipartisan agreement to fund 100,000 new, highly-trained teachers to reduce class size in the early grades. And, at the same time, it opens the door for federal funds to be used for private school vouchers. We need more teachers in smaller classes in our public schools, instead.@***

Democrats will continue to fight for full funding for the Class Size Reduction Initiative in FY 2000 B providing second-year funding for this critically-important program.

Following is an overview of why the class size reduction initiative is so badly needed in school districts across the country.

### ***ABaby Boom Echo@ Has Resulted in Record-Breaking School Enrollments Across the Country***

On August 19, 1999, the Education Department issued its Fourth Annual ABaby Boom Echo@ report, documenting how the Ababy boom echo@ B the children of baby boomers filling the schools B has led to record-breaking enrollments in schools across the country.

In the 1996-97 school year, school enrollment broke the all-time school enrollment record of 51.3 million that was set by the baby boom generation back 26 years ago, in 1971 -- by reaching 51.7 million students. In the 1997-98 school year, school enrollment rose even higher -- to 52.2 million; and in the 1998-99 school year, it reached 52.7 million students.

Now, according to the new ABaby Boom Echo@ report, in the 1999-2000 school year, school enrollment will rise even higher B rising to 53.2 million students.

Furthermore, according to the report, the burdens of rising school enrollments will continue. School enrollment is projected to continue to climb over the next several years C growing from 53.2 million in the 1999-2000 school year to 54.2 million by the 2009-2010

school year.

This most recent *ABaby Boom Echo* report highlights the enormously rapid growth in school enrollment that the country is experiencing during the 20-year period of 1989 to 2009. For example, the report points out that:

- X Between 1989 and 2009, nationally, elementary and secondary school enrollment will grow by 8.3 million students *B* or by 18%.
- X For certain states, rising school enrollment is even more dramatic. For example, between 1989 and 2009, enrollment in Georgia will grow by 37%; enrollment in California will grow by 35%; enrollment in Florida will grow by 34%; enrollment in Colorado will grow by 33%; enrollment in Texas will grow by 31%; and enrollment in Washington will grow by 29%.

### ***In Many Areas, Rising School Enrollment Has Led to Overcrowded Classrooms***

In many areas, rising school enrollments have led to overcrowded classrooms *C* with class sizes too large for effective instruction.

Although the nationwide average for class size in grades one through three is currently 22 (which is still too large), there are many areas of the country in which the average class size is considerably larger. For example:

- X In many South Florida school districts, the average class size in elementary schools is 32 students;
- X In Chicago, the average class size in grades one, two, and three is 28 students; and
- X In New York City, the average class size in grades one, two, and three is 27 students.

As any experienced teacher knows, trying to provide effective instruction in a first, second, or third grade class with as many as 27 to 32 students is almost impossible *C* with no ability to ensure that all of the children are receiving the personal attention they need and are achieving mastery of the basics.

### ***In Many Areas, Rising School Enrollment Has Led to a Shortage of Qualified Teachers***

In many areas, one of the key reasons that first, second, and third grades have as many as 27 to 32 students in the classroom is that the school district simply doesn't have enough

qualified teachers to meet growing enrollments.

In many cases, school districts across the country have simply not been able to keep up with the growing demand for qualified teachers that their growing student bodies require.

In fact, nationwide, due to rising school enrollments, the Education Department projects there will be a need for two million new teachers over the next decade.

The Democratic initiative would help struggling school districts across the country hire and pay the salaries for the additional teachers they so desperately need in the early grades & allowing class sizes in the early grades to be brought down to more appropriate levels.

### ***Research Has Shown That Small Class Size In The Early Grades Raises Student Achievement***

The reason this Democratic initiative is so important is that research has shown that small class size, particularly in the early grades, raises the level of student achievement.

Indeed, several studies have confirmed what parents and teachers already know from experience & small classes promote effective teaching and learning. The studies highlight that small class sizes are particularly important in the first three grades & when it is important that students get a solid foundation for further learning.

The most authoritative and extensive study of the influence of class size on student performance in the early grades was conducted in Tennessee, beginning in the mid-1980s.

This was a longitudinal study, which tracked the performance of students over a period of time.

The researchers in Tennessee studied 6,572 students in kindergarten through third grade & then tracked them after they left third grade. There were two groups of students studied & students in large classes (22 to 25 students) and students in small classes (13 to 17 students).

As the *New York Times* reported on January 29, 1998, the results of the long-term study were as follows:

***The researchers in Tennessee found that students in classes of 13 to 17 consistently outperformed those in classes of 22 to 25 on reading and mathematics tests, and that the gains persisted in later years.***

Dr. Barbara Nye of Tennessee State University, one of the researchers on the study, concluded: ***A Class size has one of the most profound effects on the learning environment.***

The Tennessee study found that the effects of smaller classes were largest for students in

inner-city classes. Furthermore, follow-up studies showed that these achievement gains continued after the students returned to regular-size classes after the third grade. Teachers in the study reported that they preferred small classes in order to better identify student needs, provide more individual attention, and cover more material effectively.

## ***Summary***

During the final budget negotiations, Democrats are fighting for one of their key priorities -- full funding for the Class Size Reduction Initiative. The GOP Congress is attempting to renege on the bipartisan commitment that was made last year to implement this initiative. As a part of last year=s commitment, the Congress provided the first downpayment for the initiative in FY 1999. However, now the GOP Congress is trying to gut the initiative -- by trying to roll it into a broad education block grant.

This initiative would provide funds, over a seven-year period, to help local school districts hire and pay the salaries of an additional 100,000 teachers. Hiring an additional 100,000 teachers in grades one through three would allow the nationwide average class size to be reduced to 18 students. The importance of this Democratic initiative is highlighted by the fact that several studies have confirmed that small class sizes in the early grades markedly raises student achievement c with the largest effects in inner-city classes.